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REVIEWS AND BOOK NOTICES.

La Poésie Latine (de Livius Andronicus à Rutilius Namatianus)
par FRÉDÉRIC PLESSIS, Professeur-Adjoint à la Faculté des
Lettres de l'Université de Paris. Paris, Klincksieck, 1909.
Pp. XLV + 710, 12 francs.

This volume, like those previously published in the same excellent series, has a practical purpose. The Roman poets from Livius Andronicus to Rutilius Namatianus, a period of over six hundred years, are taken up in regular order and the arrangement and development of topics is precise and systematic. The treatment is simple and clear and considering the magnitude of the subject, remarkably concise. Finally, its evident value as a handbook is enhanced by a good index and the notes, though brief and not especially numerous are quite sufficient for the purpose.

It is not, however, an exhaustive book of reference like the great histories of Roman literature by Schanz or Teuffel-Schwabe. There is no attempt to cite all the authorities or to weigh and discuss all the literature of the subject. On the contrary, the author may even choose to ignore certain theories and investigations just now in evidence or else, as for example, in his chapter on Vergil, to betray his cognisance of their existence only by an unusually careful exposition of the contrary opinion.

But a history of Roman poetry by Frédéric Plessis is likely to be quite as thorough as it is readable. Those who already know his charming *Étude sur Properce* will be prepared to find his scholarship extensive and accurate, his judgement sane, his criticism sympathetic and penetrating, his own mastery of the art of expression in harmony with the importance and variety of his subject. The combination is one which represents French criticism at its best and when we find it—which is by no means often—there is no critic of Roman poetry like a French critic. The close intellectual and aesthetic affinity along certain lines between Rome the mother and France the daughter is an inalienable portion of his heritage and it gives him a coign of vantage, the importance of which is not always appraised at its true value. It leads him, just because he is a Frenchman, to appreciate the distinctively Roman point of view more readily and, even unconsciously, to set it before us more clearly than is apt to be the case with critics whose interpretation of the Latin spirit is a matter of acquisition, not of inheritance.

For that very reason, his attitude even when we are not in sympathy with it, is none the less instructive and stimulating. To select a single example from the number that might be cited,

we find that Plessis seems to look with a certain suspicion of disfavor (p. II) upon the Hellenic conservation of dialects in the different departments of poetry and prose. Now speaking as a Latinist—but not as a Latin—I should certainly urge in reply that the prolonged opportunity for cantonal development and the characteristic persistence of it among the Greeks, the centrifugal force, so to speak, of Hellenic life, in itself, produced and preserved that amazing variety of artistic forms which was destined to be so beneficial not only to Rome herself but partly through Rome to the entire western civilisation of today. But could anything be more French and at the same time more Roman than the inborn passion for unity, uniformity, and order from which his objection is no doubt, so largely derived? In consequence of it I see more clearly than perhaps I might otherwise have done just why the Roman Empire of the West so soon became and so long persisted an empire of one law, one language, and one literature, I gain a more adequate idea of what Italy of the Middle Ages must have passed through in the way of violence, bloodshed, and confusion worse confounded before she became the bundle of dialects, local interests and petty principalities that passed under the sway of Victor Emanuel, I am impressed more deeply with the persistent survival of that old Roman spirit which has enabled her in less than fifty years to take her place again among the foremost nations of Europe.

One of the most common faults of even our best and otherwise most stimulating historians of Roman literature, has been that after making every effort to give a thoughtful and detailed judgement of Vergil, Horace and their fellow immortals, they have more than once yielded without a struggle to the labour-saving device of passing sentence upon poets having no particular standing at the bar of criticism with some conveniently indefinite phrase of general condemnation, or, worse yet, with an epigram. To hang a poet with an epigram is equivalent to lynching him. Furthermore, the epigram then reverts to its original function and like many other epitaphs presently becomes for the world at large the sole record of the departed. Scaliger's '*Silius Italicus et tous ces garçons-là*' is a vivid phrase and therefore, only too well adapted to take the place of articulate criticism. But it does not explain why Silius was evidently held in so high esteem by his contemporaries, it never led us to the discovery that among '*ces garçons-là*' was one that in his *Argonautica* has given us the most interesting and sympathetic portrayal of a feminine character in Roman literature.

The reader will find practically no traces of this method in Plessis. He is not afraid of a telling phrase whenever it illuminates the subject under discussion but one of the striking features of his book is the thoroughness and at the same time the symmetry of his treatment. No one is neglected. On the other hand, the proper perspective of values is carefully maintained.

He holds no special brief for the real or supposed victims of critical neglect.

Plessis takes unusual pains to recover an adequate conception of the genius and the personality of those authors whose works are known to us only in fragments or by hearsay. Sometimes merely a shrewd comment on human nature suggested by the evidence under discussion carries us with him straight to the heart of the matter. A case in point occurs in his chapter on Pacuvius. Gellius tells us in a well-known anecdote that Accius, after writing his *Atreus*, paid a visit to Pacuvius, then living in retirement at Tarentum, and submitted the play for criticism. After hearing it read the judgement of Pacuvius was,—*Sonora quidem esse et grandia, sed videri tamen ea sibi duriora paulum et asperiora*. "Now, if we pause to consider," comments Plessis, "that as a rule, the qualities we most admire in the works of others are those which we ourselves possess and that we have far less appreciation of those which we do not ourselves possess, we have good reason to believe that the poetry of Pacuvius was elevated and eloquent <*sonora et grandia*—the qualities he possessed and admired> but that it lacked somewhat in vigour and energy <*duriora et asperiora*—pejoratives of the qualities he did not possess and did not admire>." This shrewd interpretation of the old gentleman's polite reply to the vulgar little parvenu who had asked his opinion is amply borne out by all the surviving evidence at our command.

In line with the preceding is the care and attention with which Plessis usually discusses and explains the criticisms passed by the Romans themselves upon their great poets. He is amply justified in doing so by the fact that all of them are brief, many are misapplied or misunderstood, some, owing to time, change, literary losses and other causes, are far from clear.

Owing to the complete loss of Menander for example, Caesar's famous criticism of Terence was anything but lucid. After all, what did he mean by his 'Dimidiate Menander'? The recent discoveries—which strange to say, Plessis does not seem to mention or to take into account—give a new aspect to the matter, and Mazon's illuminating discussion (*Extraits d'Aristophane et de Ménandre*, Paris, 1908, p. 276) of Menander's genius lead us to a clearer comprehension of what Caesar probably had in mind. One wishes that Plessis of all men had chosen to discuss this point at some length.

Again, some dark place is lighted up as never before by a rare touch of human sympathy. Discussing, for example, the lost elegies of Calvus to the memory of his Quintilia Plessis says, "Son amour pour Calvus chétif et petit au point d'en être presque ridicule, sans cesse appliqué au travail et qui, avec le cœur ardent et l'esprit opiniâtre, ne devait avoir aucun des dons extérieurs qui plaisent à des yeux vulgaires, cet amour suffit pour nous faire entrevoir son caractère; sérieuse, instruite, fidèle et

tendre, toujours présente au foyer domestique, avide de se dévouer, se prenant aux grands sentiments et aux grandes pensées, telle devait être cette Quintilie, morte bien jeune encore, touchante figure sur laquelle demeure assez d'ombre pour la rendre tout à fait poétique et dont les traits peuvent cependant se détacher du passé avec quelque netteté."

But considering the purpose and general character of Plessis' book the most interesting portion of it (pp. 1-16) is his comparison of Greece and Rome in the field of literary art. Few questions of the sort have been so frequently discussed, few have been so frequently misunderstood. Yet why should we miss the meaning of such a famous contribution to this subject as,

Excudent alii spirantia mollius aera,
Cedo equidem, vivos ducent de marmore voltus,
Orabunt causas melius, caelique meatus
Describent radio et surgentia sidera dicent:
Tu regere imperio populos, Romane, memento,
Haec tibi erunt artes, pacique imponere morem
Parcere subiectis et debellare superbos,

the inspired vision of a great Roman poet which sets before us once and for all the place and the mission of his country in the history of mankind. It is clear enough here that in the realm of the aesthetic Vergil awards the primacy to Greece, in the realm of the practical, to Rome. What competent critic could deny the essential truth of this view? Vergil does not say, however, that Rome lacked the gift of poetry and that her literature at its best is merely an excellent imitation. He was himself a striking proof to the contrary. Much less does he say that the Greeks had no vocation at all for the practical side of life. He knew better. Since then, however, the constant intrusion of these two assumptions upon the discussion has really transformed the Vergilian formula into something very like this, 'The Romans could rule, therefore, they could not write; the Greeks could write, therefore, they could not rule'. A statement all the more eagerly adopted because it confirms the popular impression that no man of affairs can enjoy a good book and that no man of letters can keep his accounts straight.

"The truth is", says Plessis—and his discussion will be read with especial interest by those already acquainted with Leo's brilliant essay on *The Originality of Roman Literature*,—"that the Romans had a great literature for the very reason that they were a great people". One may reply that a great literature has always been the work of a great people. It is true, nevertheless, that the genius which formed the Roman Republic of Laws and the genius which formed the Roman Republic of Letters were more nearly akin than has usually been the case in other great nations.

The Roman talent for poetry was late to develop but this does not prove that it was any the less genuine. It is true, too, that

the Roman poets complain occasionally that the general public does not appreciate literary art. But after all, this tells us nothing definite. Appreciation of art is comparative, and when, pray, did the general public ever reach the standard of appreciation set for it by the irritable genus? The truth is that as compared with the world of today the Roman public was unusually sensitive to the charm of real literary art. This is pointed out by Plessis himself and Abbott has discussed the same question at length in one of his charming essays just published. Indeed, to this day, a public reading of Dante in one of the Italian cities is likely to command a larger and more appreciative audience than can be assembled for a similar purpose in any other part of the world.

So far as the originality of Roman poetry is concerned it is well to agree upon what we mean by originality. In literary art form and content go hand in hand. From either point of view Roman poetry is distinctly national as well as undeniably great. It is no paradox to say that Vergil is never less Homeric than when he follows him most closely. So the Roman hexameter, for example, is essentially different from the verse from which it was derived.

Readers of Plessis' own discussion might, perhaps, get the impression that he occasionally betrays a slight tendency to exalt Rome at the expense of Greece. If this were actually the case he might well reply that as a lover of Rome he had certainly had provocation enough. The great Roman poets, however, need no such support as this and in these days of acute specialisation any family jar calculated to destroy the ideal rule of *doctus sermones utriusque linguae* would be a mortal blow to any Classical scholarship really worthy of the name. Neither Greek nor Latin can afford to stand alone.

In conclusion it should be observed that one of the most notable features of this book as a whole is the constant emphasis upon the intellectual, moral, and aesthetic valuation of the poets and poetry of Rome. After all, this is the heart of the matter. However valuable the great Roman poets may be for other purposes we must not lose sight of their universal art, their essential humanity, their spiritual message to our modern world. This is the real issue, and judged by this standard their title to immortality is indefeasible.

KIRBY FLOWER SMITH.

Society and Politics in Ancient Rome; essays and sketches by
FRANK FROST ABBOTT. New York; Charles Scribner's
Sons, 1909. 267 pages.

During the past dozen years we have learned to expect of Professor Abbott accuracy of scholarship, breadth of view, and perfect lucidity of presentation, and when we read the book now